

# FROM REDSTONE TO THE WELSH TRACT

Nov 16, 2018 Pembrokeshire Historical Society No Comments

*By Mary John*

The story of Quakers in Pembrokeshire has been told a number of times. Stephen Griffiths and David Salmon were among those who made us aware that there were in fact two significant phases in which the Religious Society of Friends, as they came formally to be known, featured in the county's history. i We were reminded both of their exceedingly difficult times here in the seventeenth century and also of their more rewarding and successful settlement later in the town of Milford Haven, as whalers and business folk. Remarkably, what we find is Pembrokeshire Quaker families moving to America in the sixteen hundreds and American Quakers moving into Pembrokeshire a century or so later.

This article will focus on what can be discovered about a small group of Friends living in communities around the town of Narberth some three hundred and fifty years ago. The intention is to consider what drove them to leave Pembrokeshire and to investigate how they prospered in their new home in the New World.

Followers of the itinerant preacher George Fox, under whose influence the religious group known as Quakers came into being, arrived in Pembrokeshire in the 1650s and Fox himself visited Tenby in 1657 where he held meetings and was welcomed by the mayor and his wife. Also about that time his friend John ap John, from Wrexham, went to the local 'steeple house' and was imprisoned for standing in the church with his hat on. Fox was later to have a rough time in Haverfordwest, 'a wicked town and false'.ii These are some of the earliest records of the persecution of Quakers in Pembrokeshire for a number of offences, among them absence from church, standing in church, wearing a hat in church, non-payment of tithes, refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance. The Quakers did not meet for set religious services with clergy in consecrated buildings and in 1664 their gatherings came to be considered illegal under the Conventicle Act.

It is important to remember how difficult people's lives had already been in the early decades of the 17th century. Political and religious conflict, especially among the local gentry, would overwhelm society and the Civil War had considerable impact in and around Narberth and Redstone. In 1645 hundreds of fighting men, mounted and on foot, under Rowland Laugharne, together with a large body of seamen having sailed up the Eastern Cleddau, gathered at Canaston to march through local fields and communities to victory at the Battle of Colby Moor. With some 150 dead and 700 prisoners taken and many men fleeing, most likely in the direction of Narberth, things must have been very frightening.

That same year nearby Picton Castle was attacked and renewal of hostilities in the Second Civil War would have seen distress and upheaval with the influx of troops gathering for Cromwell's siege of Pembroke in 1648. To add to the turmoil in the county within a few years of the end of these hostilities plague broke out, causing deaths and the disruption to trade and the daily lives and movement of people.

It has been argued that the seeds of Quakerism were already planted in Pembrokeshire before the Civil War. A number of people brought before the Great Sessions in 1642 accused of attending an unlawful meeting in Haverfordwest, 'under pretence of religious worship and evil principles', would later be recognised as Quakers.iii

It would appear that Oliver Cromwell was generally sympathetic towards Quakers but things would get worse for them with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, with a harsher response from the authorities towards Nonconformity. Fines and imprisonment were handed out to men and women throughout the county but in spite of this by the late 1600s there were at least seven Quaker Meeting Houses in Pembrokeshire, one being at Redstone in the parish of Narberth North, where the first yearly Welsh Meeting was held in February 1682. Redstone Meeting was evidently flourishing. Richard Davies when he visited found the meeting held out of doors, '...there being no house that I knew of that could contain the multitude of people.'<sup>iv</sup>

The names of certain of its members feature regularly in this account. One of these was Lewis David of Trewern, now a mansion and estate between Llanddewi Velfrey and Whitland. There appears to be little evidence of Lewis David's role in 17th century Pembrokeshire society and he has been variously described as a gentleman and a yeoman but what is evident is that he was a man with money and a very committed and influential member of the Redstone group of Friends.



Map showing Redstone Meeting House, south of Redstone Cross on A40. (Pembrokeshire Record Office).

For refusing to keep away from meetings at Redstone in 1661 with his wife Susan, James Lewis, Alice Lewis, Evan John and William Thomas, all from Llanddewi Velfrey, Lewis David was imprisoned in Haverfordwest gaol, (The Cockhouse, a vaulted six roomed stone building, described as dirty and offensive, to the north of St Mary's church). On release they continued their meetings and were soon re-committed to prison where they were treated very harshly and after enduring eighteen months, sharing cells with thugs and felons and two bitter winters with no heat and little food, they were discharged due to insufficient evidence. v

Friends in the communities around Redstone were to find themselves regularly pursued. In 1678 Lewis David, Henry Lewis of Narberth and others had their goods distrained for refusing to pay towards the County Militia. In subsequent years a number of Friends had corn, hay, cows, oxen, lambs and household goods such as cloth and tankards taken for non-payment of tithes. Lewis David had taken from him 'by the servants of Evan Harris, Tithe-farmer, and Nicholas Roberts, priest, about a fifth part of all his corn. On another occasion, for not paying a 20/- fine, Lewis David 'had his corn and hay seized to the value of 25/- and sold for 8/-, being all the effects he had in the county of Pembroke, but he having a house and land in Carmarthenshire, the justices sent a certificate thither, by which his cattle, corn, hay and bedding was seized to the value of 36/- more, which also sold for 8/-'.vi Henry Lewis of Narberth had taken from him 'a bible and a shovel worth 6/2 for refusing to pay the customary assessments towards repairing the steeple houses.'vii

William Thomas of Llanddewi Velfrey, 'being fined 5s was met on the Highway by the chief constable, a petty constable and an Informer, who demanded the horse he rode upon, he asking for their warrant was answered with "Sirrah, do you question the king's power?" and at the same time was struck on the head and shoulders with a great staff and plucked from his horse...' The horse was taken away for the 5s and later sold for £3:1s:4d.viii Income from goods sold cheaply was sometimes given to the poor. However, Besse tells us 'they conscious of the Sufferers Innocence from whose charity they had often found Relief, refused to receive any of that Money when tendred (sic) them.'ix In spite of the Toleration Act of 1689 granted to protestant dissenters goods were still being seized from members of the Society of Friends well into the 18th century.x Thomas Wilson in his journal described his travels in Wales in 1684 and how he received rough treatment from a constable and informer when he attempted to 'Preach the Word of the Lord to the People' in Redstone Meeting House.xi By then, however, several of the Friends were no longer in attendance. On the 6th of June 1682 in Pennsylvania, America, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting was welcoming Lewis David, Henry Lewis and William Howell and accepting their certificate of introduction from the General Meeting at Redstone.

In 1681 the influential Quaker, William Penn, had been granted by his friend, Charles II of England, control of a considerable area of land in North America in which it was understood a colony would be established. That same year a number of Quakers from different parts of Wales travelled to London to meet with Penn who intended to offer them an opportunity to purchase 30,000 acres of this territory, divided into blocks of 5,000 acres. As it happened, seven purchasers came forward and they were granted land under what Penn considered the Dutch 'patroon' system, requiring them to look on him as their leader.

In time the lack of legal documentation covering this agreement would come to haunt the Welsh purchasers, Lewis David of Llanddewi Velfrey being one, committing himself to 3,000 acres for the sum of £60.

Of the 3,000 acres conveyed to Lewis David by deed dated 2 March, 1682, 500 were taken by William Howell, yeoman, (of Castlebythe), 1,000 acres by Henry Lewis, yeoman, of Narberth, 500 by Rees Rothers, yeoman, (of Llanwenog), 250 by Evan Thomas, yeoman, (of Llanycefn). Lewis David retained 750 acres for himself. This group is described by Browning in his book, Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania, as Company No. 5.xii One can imagine an air of both excitement and trepidation in the Redstone community when these purchases became known. How many individuals took up the offer to leave Pembrokeshire for Pennsylvania is not clear but eventually the emigration of the Redstone members would be painfully felt.



For some years there was movement back and forward between the Old Country and the New World and preachers returned to address the Friends. However, regular meetings at Redstone came to an end in 1766. Records of the Monthly Meeting in the early 1800s reveal that the Meeting House and the stable were 'in a state of general decay, the roof being partly uncovered...The Meeting House is untenanted; one end of the stable affords shelter to the old woman who quitted the Meeting House when the roof fell in...'xiii Paul Starbuck was to report in 1822 that he had sold Redstone for £45 and Puncheston for £20.xiv By 1867 the Meeting House at Redstone was in ruins.xv

The Trewern home of Lewis David is no longer in evidence. An early 19th century mansion now occupies the land in Llanddewi Velfrey, some 3km north-west of Whitland. Close by on the hill above the A40 is the Quaker burial ground which would appear to have been acquired some time in the later 18th century because records from the early 1700s show Friends were being interred at East Hook, Lambston, west of Haverfordwest.





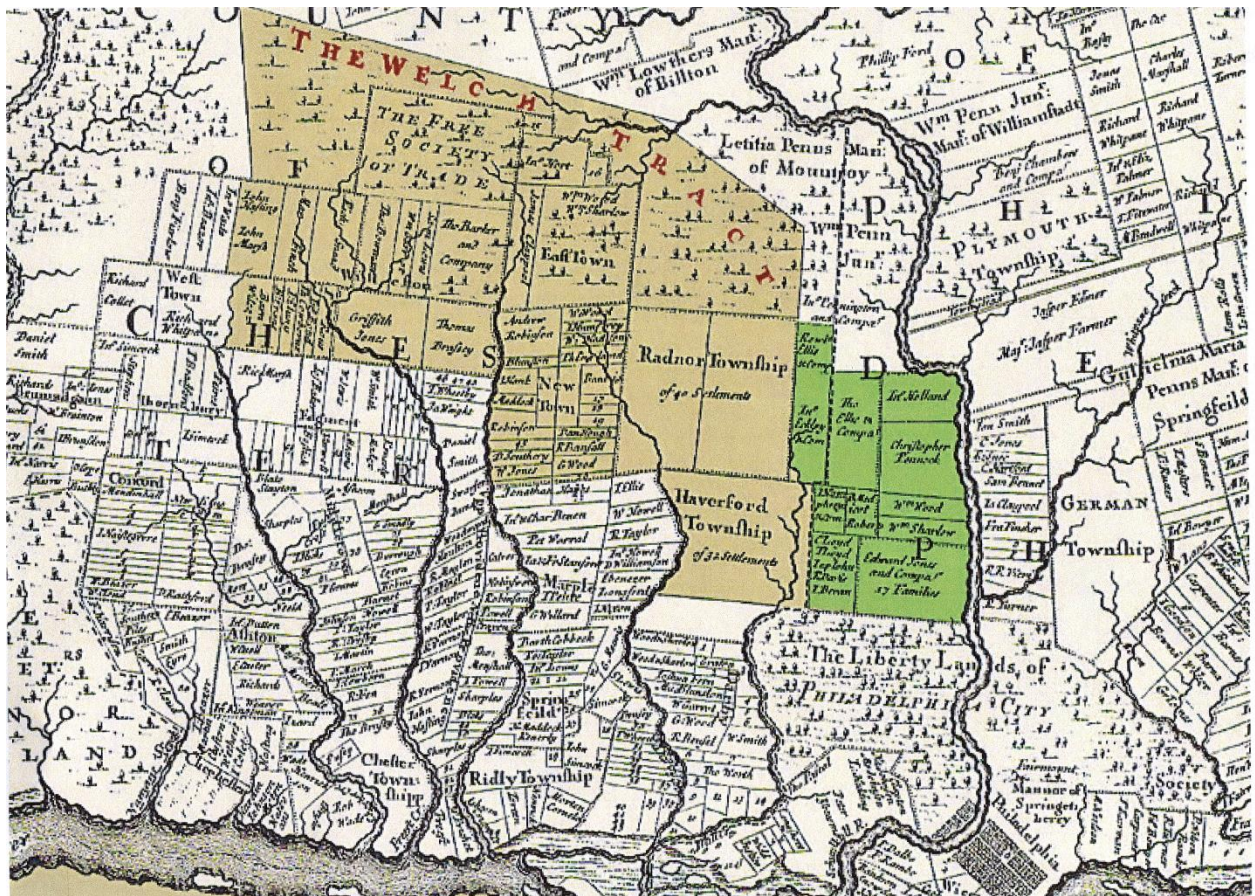
## THE JOURNEY

There are a number of accounts of the early journeys made from Wales to Pennsylvania by Quakers, many of them recorded by descendants of the early settlers. There appear to have been three main streams of emigrants, from the counties of Pembrokeshire, Radnorshire and Merionethshire. Browning tells us that in 1682-83 Welsh settlers crossed the seas to their new home in 23 ships.<sup>xvi</sup> They were heading across the Atlantic to the mouth of the Delaware River to settle in land north of Philadelphia and west of the Schuylkill River.

One ship, the William Galley, sailed from Carmarthen with Friends from Pembrokeshire and Radnorshire on board. For those over twelve years of age the charge was £5 and for children £2:10. Sucklings and furniture up to 20 tons were transported free. The ship's surgeon required a payment of 5s from each family and 1s from each unmarried person, except servants. xvii Among the provisions on board ship were beer, water, and barrels of beef, butter cheese and oatmeal.xviii Thomas Glenn reported that in August 1682 the 'good ship Lyon' arrived in Delaware with 40 passengers.xix

We understand that the journey by sailing ship took a number of weeks, sometimes as long as four months. Indeed, some journeys gave time enough for Welsh speakers to learn English. The Bible of John George Eaton, a settler's descendant, records that Friends left Llanddewi Velfrey on 1 August 1683 to go to a port in Milford Haven and they arrived in Philadelphia early in November. It is recorded that some travellers had very uncomfortable times in rough seas and 'contrary winds'.xx There is also an account of people suffering from hunger due to ship's damage and torn sails and having to seek shelter in the West Indies. xxi

Glenn records that during the next three decades Quaker Friends went to Pennsylvania from Redstone, Llanddewi Velfrey, Narberth, Haverfordwest, Tenby, Puncteston, Llandisilio, Castlebythe, Little Newcastle and Uzmaston.





The Welsh Tract, by then some 40,000 acres, stretched northward along the south-west bank of the Schuylkill River and westward and south-westward over south-eastern Pennsylvania. In general it would cover within its borders eleven and one-half townships in Delaware, Chester and Montgomerie counties.

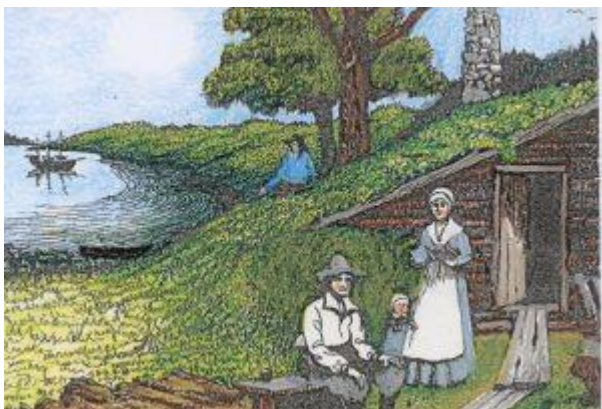
'And the Welsh Friends were hardly forerunners even in the land, for the way had long been made clear for their peaceful entrance into their purchased lands, and many were able to be seated at the very first on old "Indian fields," and on clearings made by their predecessors, the Swedes, Dutch and early English, who came up here from the old settlements on the lower Delaware.'xxii

Accounts of life for these early Welsh settlers make uncomfortable reading. It is understood that the first winters after their arrival in Pennsylvania were intensely cold. Landing their goods and finding shelter in territory only partly cleared, little in the way of roads, and much of it entire wilderness must have been traumatic. Many initially took cover under trees before building make-shift wooden huts, some moving into caves, dug along the Schuylkill River. Browning gives us a description of these:

*'First, a pit was dug, three feet deep, and twelve by fifteen feet in extent, in the river bank, well up from the water. The side towards the river was levelled and left open. The side walls were carried up from the ground to the height of the tallest man standing erect, with interlaced and thatched saplings, and the roof over all was also made this way.'*xxiii

We are told these caves would be rented to generations of new settlers after their occupants had taken timber from the forests to build more substantial homes.

*'The finest log cabins were built of barked and hewn logs of equal thickness, with stairs, or a ladder on the outside to reach the upper chamber, the first floor was pounded earth, as was the floors of all the early meeting houses'* xxiv



Some of the original settlers brought servants with them, many given pieces of land after serving their time. Burial records indicate that it was not uncommon for Quakers to acquire black slaves and this practice went on for decades in Pennsylvania. Although there were fruits and wild creatures in the forests to supply some of their food there was a severe shortage of cows and other domesticated animals. Cows for milking, when they could be obtained, were shared among the settlers. However, by the end of the 17th century there was a much more plentiful supply of foodstuffs which included beef, pork, mutton, cheese and butter. Horses and cows could be readily acquired.

The native Indian people who had received them kindly and assisted them through their hardships on arrival continued to live peaceably alongside them although being generally itinerant hunters they must have been attracted by the new animal life brought in. Within a few years the Welsh settlers were complaining of being frightened by these hunters and “*for ye Rapine and Destruction of their Hoggs*” xxv

*‘These first comers, after their arrival, soon cleared land enough to make way for a crop of Indian corn, in the succeeding spring, and in a year or two, they began upon wheat, and other grain. Thus they went improving until they got into a comfortable way of living.’*xxvi

Browning concludes that in the early years settlers farmed for their own needs and not on a commercial scale. There were at that time no country stores and people were having to travel to Philadelphia for some necessities, often exchanging their produce for dry goods and groceries. xxvii They also expected quite naturally, coming from the farming communities of Wales, to set up their own water mills to deal with the harvest. One can imagine their dismay when on arrival they learned that William Penn had the monopoly on all kinds of milling. Private mills, whether for grist or timber, were forbidden. To have their grain ground the Welsh had to transport it many miles to the ‘Proprietors Mill’. Fortunately this problem appears to have been resolved for in 1700 we find Lewis David a part owner of a grist mill in Haverford. In fact grist mills, saw mills and fulling mills were to become plentiful in creeks along the boundaries of Haverford township well into the next century.

Another conflict between Penn and the Welsh Friends arose from their crossings of the River Schuylkill. Their custom was to pay a ferryman with a flat boat to carry them, their goods and their animals to fairs, markets and assemblies in Delaware but it was not long before Penn was demanding revenue from all crossings of the river and arranged a ferry in competition which he leased out. In spite of their difficulties, with the ferryman being imprisoned and the boat seized, the Welsh held out for a number of years and it was not until the early 1720s that Philadelphia recognised the need for a public ferry across the Schuylkill.xxviii

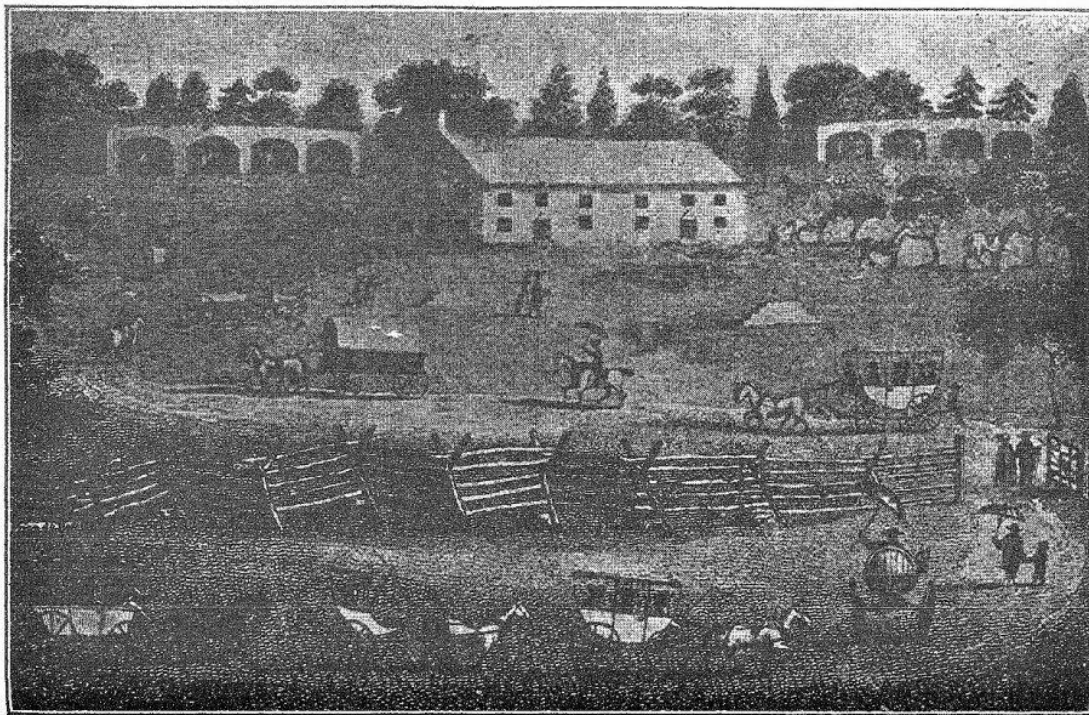
In spite of these difficulties a man called Oldmixon, writing in 1708, said of the Welsh Tract:

*‘Tis very populous and the people are very industrious, by which means this country is better cleared than any other part of the country. The inhabitants have many fine plantations; they are looked upon to be as thriving and wealthy as any in the province...’*xxix

As more and more settlers arrived communities banded together in townships and it was not many years before the townships of Merion, Haverford and Radnor were established to the west of the Schuylkill River. The Welsh Tract was beginning to take shape and naturally a priority was the building of Meeting Houses. We are told that the first meetings of the Welsh Friends were ‘...beneath the great trees of the primeval trees about them, in pleasant weather and otherwise, at the primitive home of a family, in their settlement, be it then a cave, tent or lean-to shelter...’xxx



(Illustration in Browning)



**FRIENDS GOING TO MONTHLY MEETING.**

(Illustration in Browning)

There being a number of Quakers in Philadelphia, monthly meetings were soon well established but the Welsh Tract townships were far apart and friends and neighbours from the old country met informally. In 1682 Haverford was made up of only four Pembrokeshire families, those of Lewis David, Henry Lewis, William Howell and George Painter. As more people arrived things got organised locally and by 1684 log houses for public meetings were erected in Merion and Haverford. Friends were required to produce the certificates they had brought from their Meeting Houses in Wales.

Among these were Henry Lewis, Lewis David and William Howell from the Redstone Meeting in Pembrokeshire, their certificates dated 6 June, 1682. They became the founders of the Preparative Meeting of Haverford. More records of certificates from Redstone appear over the next few decades. At the Chester Monthly Meeting in Delaware in June 1711 Francis Jones produced a Redstone certificate for himself and his family, having come to Pembrokeshire from Ireland three years before.<sup>xxxi</sup>



Although the name of Lewis David of Trewern crops up on a number of occasions when religious and civil matters are mentioned in the early records of Quaker settlements in America, we are provided with very little personal information about the man and his family. We learn from the few surviving marriage records of the England and Wales Society of Friends that Susana, wife of Lewis David of Llanddewi Velfry was buried in Pembrokeshire on October 22, 1682. Lewis left some of his children in Wales when he travelled to Pennsylvania and it is later recorded that a Lewis David married Florence Jones at the Haverford Meeting in 1690.

One could guess that he was something of a speculator. He appears to have bought and sold various sections of the Tract and as time went by he was to sell off much of the 750 acres he had originally retained for himself. This included 250 acres to Maurice Scourfield of Narberth and 260 acres in Haverford township to Peregrine Musgrove, the Haverfordwest clothier, who in 1674 had married his daughter Alice back in Redstone. Evidently he involved himself rigorously in the fight for the survival of the Welsh Tract. Lewis David died and was buried at the Merion Meeting January 2, 1708.

Henry Lewis, from near Narberth, a carpenter by trade, and his wife Margaret had a plantation of 250 acres in Haverford and he was to name his new home 'Maencoch' (Redstone). He was described as a benevolent man who having originally joined the Philadelphia Friends committed himself 'to visit the poor and sick, and administer what they should judge convenient, at the expense of the Meeting.' He held the office of 'peacemaker', and was foreman of the first Grand Jury for the county of Philadelphia.<sup>xxxii</sup> A founder member of the community, Henry did not have many years in Pennsylvania. He died in 1705.

The Welsh Tract would eventually cover what would become eleven and a half townships in what are now Delaware, Chester and Montgomery Counties, Merion and Radnor being named after the shires of the old country and Haverford after the town of Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire. William Penn had determined when he sold this land to the Welsh that it would be considered a 'Barony' or State in what he retained as his province, "...within which all causes, quarrels, crimes and disputes might be tried and wholly determined by officers, magistrates, and juries of our language".<sup>xxxiii</sup> In fact he sold this territory without giving information about locations, conditions or restrictions under which he made the conveyances. Added to this was the problem that the 62½ square miles were not surveyed for a further six years. It appears that this was to cause some confusion for people buying land subsequently, often direct from Penn, who found themselves involved in litigation or resurveys. Amongst these were John Burge, a clothier from Haverfordwest, and William Jenkins, an emasculator from Tenby.

The Welsh understood that their purchases would lie alongside each other in the Tract. They expected to control and govern their lives according to the customs and expectations they had brought with them from their native country. This was soon to be denied them by William Penn. He considered himself, having received his authority from the Crown, to be the sovereign of the state of Pennsylvania, with full power to form a government to suit his own ideas and according to the laws of England. He was to renege on his original verbal agreement, insisting that the first Welsh purchasers were only trustees. Having arranged a final survey of the Welsh Tract he planned to take back for himself what he considered unsettled lands which he then sold off to others, not necessarily Welsh.

Then Penn divided the Tract into three parts, the townships of Merion, Radnor and Haverford and started up other towns and he did not allow the inhabitants to choose their own officers. These were appointed by the County Court although these Welsh Quaker townships continued to manage some level of control of their activities at their gatherings at the Meeting Houses. Sadly less than three years after its initial settlement the Welsh Tract began to fall apart. In 1685, without any notice to its inhabitants, it was decided by the Provincial Council that a large slice of the Welsh Tract should be cut off and a new boundary line drawn between the counties of Philadelphia and Chester. Nothing was done about this for three years until, using the questionable evidence of surveyor Thomas Holme's Map of the Province of Pennsylvania, and after much debate, both legal and regarding the opinions of William Penn, Chester County Court, assumed regulation of both Haverford and Radnor. However, for some time many of the worthies of these townships continued to refuse to serve on Chester public bodies and the Haverford and Radnor Friends continued to attend meetings at Merion.

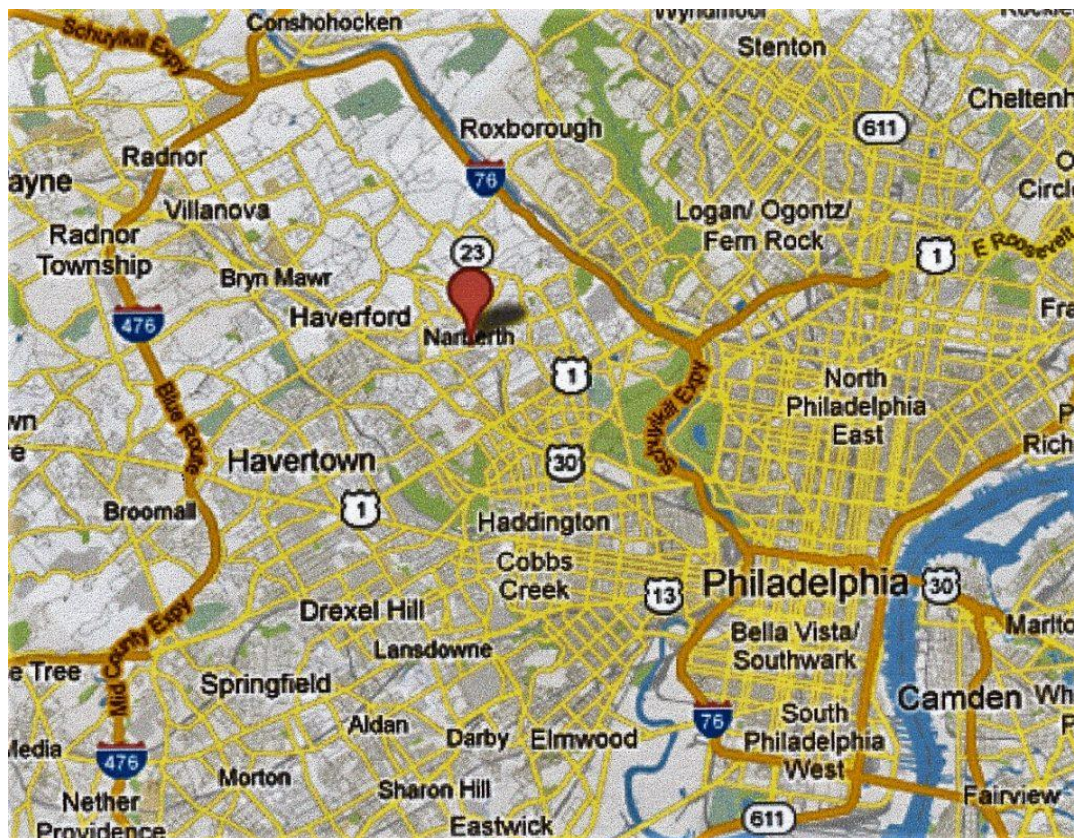
The Welsh would continue to have problems in their Tract, with squatters and with English settlers taking land overlapping from Chester County. Penn was still anxious to profit from sale of their unsettled land and sent out his surveyors, claiming his right to a share in every township. xxxiv

By 1690 the Welsh Tract was seriously under threat from Land Commissioners set up by Penn who wished to sell off Tract land which they considered 'not laid out, or not seated and Improved'. The Welsh in a desperate attempt to discourage encroachments upon the lines and boundaries of their Tract responded with a paper presented to the Commissioners in which they declared:-

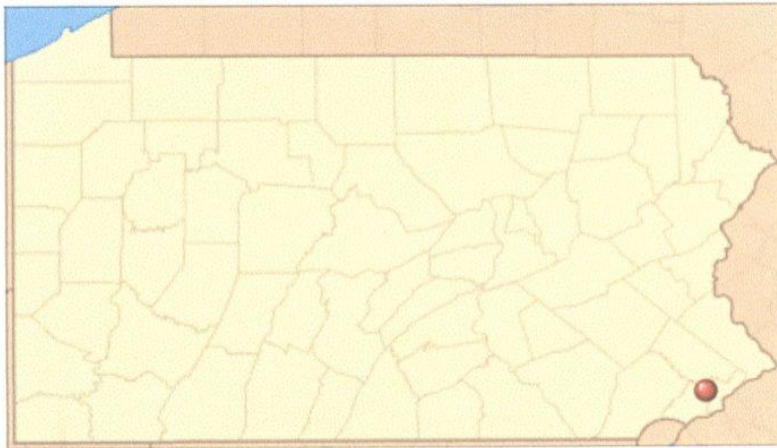
*'...with an open face to God and man, that we Desired to be by ourselves for no other End, or purpose that we might live together as Civill Society, to endeavour to deside (sic) all controversies and debates among ourselves, in a Gospell order, and not to entangle ourselves with Laws in an unknown Tongue, as also to preserve our Language, that we might ever keep Correspondence with friends in the land of our Nativity.'* xxxv

The Commissioners were evidently on the side of William Penn. Complex legal arguments went on for many months but Penn, now in financial difficulties, was determined to open up parts of the Tract to purchasers of other nationalities and religions and also to some of his pressing creditors. The unoccupied land was put on the market and this signalled the end of the Welsh Tract.

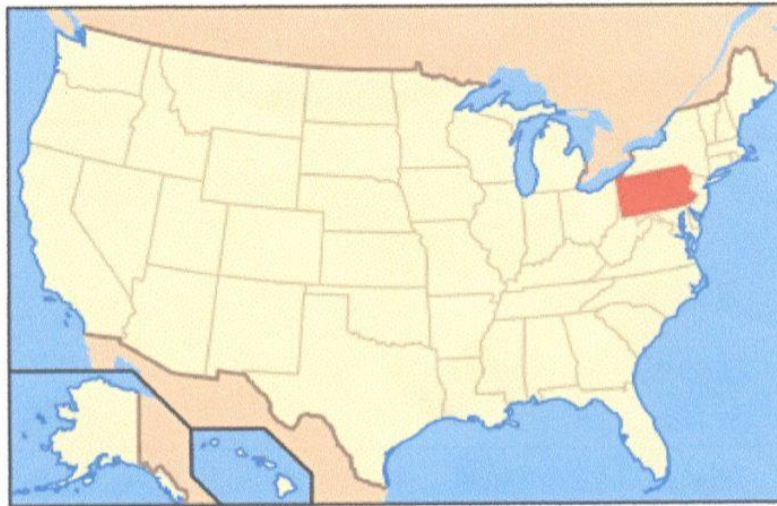
We are used to places in the 'New World' being named after the 'Old Country'. Haverford, Merion and Radnor do not surprise us. But what do we know of Narberth, a thriving town of about 5,000 people in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania? We are told that it is surrounded by the Township of Merion and is mostly residential 'with leafy, picturesque suburbs with quaint Welsh names'. xxxvi Settled on a parcel of land originally deeded to Edward Rees who arrived in America in 1682 it was a Quaker friendly town originally called Elm, founded in 1881 by Edward Price. Not until 1893 did it change its name to Narberth. So, some two hundred years after the original settlement of the Welsh Tract was Redstone still in the minds of our Pennsylvania Friends?







Location of Narberth in Pennsylvania



Location of Pennsylvania in the United States

#### NOTES

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\*I would like to thank The Lower Merion Historical Society for use of log cabin illustrations.  
(Celebrating William Penn's Settlement in Lower Merion and Narberth 1682-2007

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